

## **Nigeria to the World and Back: A Cosmolocal Study of Nasarawa State Dance Performances at International Festivals**

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### **Abstract**

As stipulated in the 1988 Nigerian Cultural Policy, the mandate of the National Council for Art and Culture (NCAC) is to promote, preserve, and disseminate the diversity of cultural expressions of the country. This mandate also drives the activities of the various State Councils of Art and Culture/government-owned performing troupes in Nigeria. One of the main activities of the troupes is dance performances, especially at festivals. These dance performances are viable cultural products which also function as cultural diplomacy mechanisms for Nigeria. This paper therefore offers an empirical account of two dance performances of the Nasarawa State Performing Troupe (NSPT) of Nigeria as they navigate diverse spaces. The dances—*Su Dir* and *Njieh Kreh*—are examined through the lens of Simbao’s (2018) cosmolocal orientation concept to consider their evolution as performed at local, national, and international festivals. Interrogating the processes involved in the (re)creation of these dance products for consumption at the various festivals, we further explore the implications of this cycle of choreographic experiments. The data for this study was collated through participant observation and interview research methods, as well as analysis of recorded performance videos.

*Keywords:* cosmolocalism, dance theatre, festivals, Nasarawa state performing troupe, Nigeria

### **Introduction**

“Dance in Nigeria today functions in the worlds which may be clearly differentiated for study purposes but do in fact merge in the traditional world, the neo-traditional world and the contemporary world.” (Harper, 1969, p. 1)

Nigeria is a plural state that is reputedly populated with over two hundred million people of over three hundred ethnic groups, speaking about six hundred languages and dialects (Osuntokun, 2011; Tume, 2021). In alignment with the intention of the founding fathers of Nigeria to “weld together the disparate ethnic groups that constitute the federation,” the tangible and intangible arts produced by the multiple cultures within the country play significant roles in its national development (Ojo,

2021, p. 1). The diverse arts also serve as cultural products which express and propagate the Nigerian cultures to the world. Dance is a popular cultural product among Nigerians, and a vital aspect of theatre practice in Nigeria. For this reason, it forms the core activity of most performing troupes in the country.

In Nigeria, theatre practice can be loosely classified into two: the public and private practice. The public refers to the theatre practice solely funded by the government while the private has to do with the private performing troupes which are self-funded or depend on the patronage and philanthropy of individuals and corporate organisations. The public theatre practice is directly funded by the government through the State Art Councils. This includes the Abuja Cultural Troupe in the Federal Capital Territory, and the National Troupe of Nigeria (NTN) in Lagos. Nigeria has thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Hence, there are thirty-eight government-owned performing troupes in Nigeria.

All the government-owned performing troupes function under the National Council for Art and Culture (NCAC) mandate as outlined in the 1988 Nigerian Cultural Policy. The specific duties of the NCAC are to:

- i. Promote and foster the appreciation, revival, and development of Nigerian arts and culture
- ii. Plan and coordinate cultural activities in Nigeria and foster the development of literary, visual, and the performing arts in Nigeria;
- iii. Render assistance to the States in the field of Arts and Culture; and
- iv. Promote the development of music, traditional dancing, drama, indigenous games, opera, cinema, films, photography, folklore, oral tradition, literature and poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture and general arts, woodwork, embroidery, woodwork, and other crafts (laws.lawnigeria.com).

The Nasarawa State Performing Troupe (NSPT) has been variously adjudged as one of the most vibrant and multi-talented performing troupes in Nigeria. The fame of the troupe extends beyond the shores of Nigeria, as they have won the most coveted awards in Nigeria, and also represented the country at key international festivals and carnivals in Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. Of the 36 states in Nigeria, Nasarawa is one of the most culturally diverse. The state has 31 distinct ethnic groups, and the troupe is particularly known for producing dance performances that reflect a fusion of cultural materials of the diverse ethnic groups within the state.

Festivals are an avenue to celebrate communality and also exhibit cultural heritage such as dances. Nigeria, being a multi-ethnic state is replete with cultural festivals that promote the performing arts, and dance in particular. Every year, NSPT harvests raw materials of dance from the various cultural festivals within the state. The dances which are originally performed by the “local” people, who are considered to be the authentic producers and custodians of the diverse cultures, are then harnessed with other cultural materials for performances at state functions. The same dances are subsequently refined for performances at the national stage and are later exported to the international stage where they represent Nigeria. After coming into contact with other cultures on the international stage, the dances are brought back to the original

“local” owners in a new and vibrant form. By virtue of their dynamic exposure and modifications, these dances qualify as cosmological products. The focus of this paper is on two dance theatre pieces produced by NSPT: *Su Dir* and *Njieh Kreh*. The paper examines the reflection of the cosmologicalism concept in the two Nasarawa state dance entries under study, as performed in Nigeria and at international festivals.

### Of Dance and Cosmological Orientations

Dance is a “major art” that has always been an “integral” and important component of Nigerian society and diverse cultures (Harper, 1969, p. 1). It is a cultural product which has the power to shape and define identities, and also frame the civilization of the people who own it (Sharer, 2023). It has also been acknowledged for its potential to be an effective medium for intercultural communication as well as a tool for the mobilisation of cultural diplomacy (Henry, 2000; Warburton, 2017; Odunze, 2020). Apart from the fact that it codifies and communicates the norms of a people, dance also dons multiple identities such as art, movement, music, language, ritual, festival, masquerade, costume, performance, music, drama, and theatre, within the Nigerian worldview (Abbe, 2014; Tume, 2023). The resourceful nature of dance therefore makes it a prominent feature in the activities of government-owned performing troupes in Nigeria.

As propounded by Wolfgang Sachs, cosmologicalism (also known as cosmopolitan localism) is a social theory that transfigures the relationship between locality and universality, respecting and promoting local communities across a global network of equal co-existence (Sachs, 1992; Schismenos, 2019). A portmanteau of the words *cosmos* and *local*, cosmological not only suggests the movement of a product from locality to universality, it also refers to the dynamic potentials involved in the procedure of linking the local and global communities through production and consumption (Manzini, 2015; Ramos, 2017; Schismenos et al., 2020). Cosmologicalism has also been described as a new form of social coexistence produced through egalitarian and transnational collaborative networks while exploring the interconnectedness of the urban and the rural (Schismenos et al., 2020; Kostakis et al., 2023). Basically, cosmologicalism observes the connection that evolves in the process of growing a product from the local and distributing it to the global.

Though its origins can be traced to the fields of “environment, development, and globalisation,” the tentacles of the cosmological concept have spread to “digital communication networks,” “design and peer production,” as well as “traditional ceremonies” like festivals (Sachs, 2015; Schismenos et al., 2020; Simbao, 2018). In her article titled *Trickster Spatialization and the Politics of Cultural Bargaining in Zambia*, Simbao (2018, p. 256) views cosmologicalism as “embodied orientation, attitude and interrelatedness.” She reiterates that cosmological orientations are situationally cosmopolitan and should not be assumed to be experienced or performed only in fast, large, wealthy, or privileged places (Simbao, 2016; 2018). She further argues that embracing cosmologicalism enables the local to escape the limitations of parochialism (Simbao, 2018).

Contrary to the colonial stereotypical framings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which

viewed African villages and their products as “static,” “closed,” “backward, primitive, and uncivilised,” evidence has shown that dance as an African cultural product is “outward engaging,” allows for “ongoing process-based acts of spatial bargaining” and “has the potential to exist anywhere” (Warf, 2009, p. 75; Massey, 2015, p. 140; Simbao, 2018, p. 256). Several government-owned and private troupes in Nigeria have had the opportunity to travel abroad to perform at festivals, carnivals, and other events. On these performance trips, the troupes represent Nigeria as a whole. Their performances, which are mostly in the form of dance, explore the coloration of varied ethnic identities to project a positive cultural image for Nigeria. Against this background, we conceptualise cosmological dance products as dances that are created locally but distributed globally. Taking a cue from this foregrounding stance, this paper situates the analysis of the two NSPT dances under study within the framework of cosmologicalism. It interrogates the local production and global distribution of Nasarawa dance products and the resultant dynamics.

### Analysis of *Su Dir* and *Njeh Kreh*

#### *Su Dir* in performance

Treating the focal themes of love and inter-ethnic marriage, *Su Dir* tells the story of two lovebirds, Ojah and Dari, as true love helps them overcome their adversary. The dance theatre starts with Ojah and Dari playing by a farm path. Both Ojah and Dari wear the navy-blue Ashli-awhim looms of the traditional Eggon costumes, while the latter adorns the Mighili accessories of white cowries on her neck and wrists. Dari is busy breaking palm kernels on the traditional Mada Ndallah grinding stone with the Glah little axe, while Ojah does his best to lovingly distract her. Soon, Dari abandons her task and succumbs to Ojah’s whims. Employing natural and expressive movements, the lovebirds revel in each other’s company and reassurance of their love.

Dari’s friends, who wear casual contemporary Ankara attires, dance onto stage observing the lovers with amusement and good-natured jealousy. With the feet stomping Kabulu movements of the Gbagyi people, Dari’s friends urge her to leave with them. She declines and stays with her lover, Ojah. After her friends’ exit, Dari drapes her scarf round her lover’s neck to pledge her undying love to him. This action is typical of the peak of courtship in the Eggon culture.

In a moment of distraction while admiring Dari’s scarf, Ojah takes his eyes off his heartthrob. Within a twinkling of an eye, confusion sets in as another suitor, Toumoh, a young man from the Mada ethnic group, shows up with his friends to abduct Dari. This is a perfect execution of the *NarMbe* marriage by abduction style of the Mada people. In traditional societies of the Mada, Gbagyi, Eggon, Rindre and Alago people, “capture marriage” is traditionally one of the numerous legitimate methods of wedlock. Toumoh and his friends, who are costumed in the wine-coloured casual work attires of the Mada people and accessorised with Owa leg rattles, easily outnumber Ojah. Ojah is helpless and heartbroken. Executing the marching Kabulu movements of the Gbagyi people, Ojah quickly enlists the help of his friends, who are also wearing the navy-blue Ashli-awhim Eggon shorts. They organise a search party to locate Dari. Their efforts are in vain. Clutching his heart in anguish, Ojah

breaks into a sorrowful song:

Gwandara song:

*Dari we, Dari wee yee  
Yani Dari nke ayi aure adari bo  
Ya sa maza kuka yee  
Eeee eee ooh*

English Transliteration:

Oh Dari, Dari my heartthrob  
Our love is under attack  
My heart aches and my manly tears flow  
Eeee eee ooh

When it becomes obvious that the search is a fruitless one, Ojah and his friends exit using the swirling Ompokwu movement of the Gwandara people, while suspending their arms across their chests alternately.

Following the successful abduction of Dari, Toumoh's family, led by his father, goes to Dari's people to officially indicate their son's interest in marrying Dari. Toumoh's parents wear the traditional white and black Angyer costume of the Tiv people, while the father also carries the animal skin Kpar bag which symbolises royalty in Tiv culture. Toumoh's kinsmen wear the traditional wine coloured Mada costumes, sporting the Eggon waist adornment, Eggon Eshri-aku hunter head gear made from baboon's skins, and Owa leg rattles of the Gwandara people as accessories. Dari's father on the other hand, wears the multi-coloured traditional Okpa Khose attire of the Alago people, while her other kinsmen adorn the Nasarawa colours in traditional looms. Toumoh's kinsmen perform the Rindre arm akimbo and feet-shuffling movement and the Eggon feet-stomping movements, while Dari's people execute the side to side ninety degrees hand-swaying movement of the Afo people.

After the formal announcement of Toumoh's intention to marry Dari, preparations for the wedding ceremony begin without delay. The wedding ceremony proper between Toumoh and Dari is kick-started with a song:

Gwandara song:

*Amarya da ango ku yi tafiya ze ze  
Kar da wuta ya zo a kiya ku boo*

English Transliteration:

Bride and groom, do tread carefully  
So that your fingers do not get burnt

Maidens from Dari's family dance in with the marching Odu movements of the Alago movement and the side-to-side arm swinging Alago movements, to the Owa music of the Gwandara people. Borrowing from the typical Gbagyi marriage tradition of Kayan Mata, the maidens display the elaborate and flamboyant bridal luggage, which consists of beauty products, kitchen utensils, and general household items. Dari's parents wear the multi-coloured traditional Okpa Khose and Ottena costumes, while the maidens are costumed in the Nasarawa colours in traditional looms. Dari herself adorns the midnight blue Gbagyijeh traditional attire of the Gbagyi people, designed in the Mighili two-piece style with cowries and white buttons and Hausa Jigida waist beads for accessories. Her body is also touched up with the honey and benny-seed make up typical of Mada brides. Toumoh's family members also dance in with the feet stomping Eggon movements. Toumoh wears the full animal skin traditional ceremonial regalia of the Mada people, while his parents wear the same costumes they wore during the bridal negotiation. Ojah also sneaks in with his friends and family looking totally forlorn. In spite of their downcast demeanour, Ojah and his entourage sport the multi-coloured ceremonial Okpa Khose attires of the Alago people, while the two elders in the entourage adorn the traditional Eggon costumes of dried raffia round their waists and heads.

In excitement, Toumoh executes the side-to-side alternate bouncing Owa movements of the Gwandara people, while Dari dolefully performs the feet tapping Mighili dance movements, while holding the edges of her wrapper. During the wedding ceremony proper, Toumoh is subjected to the mandatory traditional Kembah ritual of the Mada culture. In Mada tradition, the Kembah ritual is performed to determine whether a marriage will succeed or not. For a marriage to succeed, the Kembah calabash must sit gracefully on the bride's head without shaking. However, during this particular wedding ceremony, the Kembah calabash falls down twice when placed on Dari's head. This signifies impending doom for the marriage, at which point the elders have no other choice than to allow the bride to present the Kembah calabash to the suitor of her choice. Feeling vindicated, Dari executes the Rindre dance movements, as she sings soulfully:

Rindre song:

*Do si kpi eh, do si kpi mboro*  
*Ana we brela, do si kpi mboro*  
*Oh do si kpi eh, do si kpi mboro*

English Transliteration:

My heartthrob, where are you?  
 I need you now, my love! Where are you?  
 My heartthrob, where are you?

After a brief but dramatic search, Dari locates Ojah, and joyfully hands over the Kembah calabash to him. On collecting the Kembah calabash from Dari, Ojah's friends rejoice with him, clapping and singing thus:

Alago song:

*Ariye na riye eee, ariye na ri yaa  
Oyi komu ikete na ri ye  
Eno, o beshi ya gboza na riya*

English Transliteration:

You are the chosen one, all hail the chosen one  
Son of Ikete, the unlikely contender has won the day  
You have indeed made your mother proud

This bit is reminiscent of the celebration in the Igyonya segment of the Oyarore festival. Igyonya is the celebration that occurs during the Oyarore festival, when the young man who emerges as the lucky winner of a spear-throwing contest is presented with a virgin bride.

In apprehension of the outcome of the pending Kembeh ritual, Ojah solicits communal support with a song:

Alago song:

*Obakonumele, oji ya koyu depe me lee  
Oyun tepe yepe fafa  
Ogyime e pe wa putu  
Oyun ta pepe gbulagada  
Enowa leyi ja ja ja  
Oyumogu moh amanda, amanda kyogu iyi felele  
Ogyeme eba lonyee, go le ga zaa oputu kya wowawaa*

English Transliteration:

My brothers, do not desert me this day  
Do not fetch me a mat because you think I have won  
Lest you come back to find me lying on the bare floor  
I need your protection from this hot sun  
I once heard your hearkened to your distress call  
Now I am exposed, please return the favour  
Support me, please, do not let me be ashamed

Ojah's friends form a circle around him chorusing the song and clapping vigorously in accompaniment. As the process of the Kembeh ritual is repeated with Ojah, his friends rally round to support him. Being a Mada traditional ritual, Mada spiritual elders also surround the couple to signify their support with stomping Vringbe movements. The Kembeh ritual ends successfully, and the performance closes with a celebration dance by the maidens and young men. They perform the

Mbaya waist twisting movement of the Ninzom ethnic group. They sing:

Mada song:

*Oh ya, oh yaya iya kawo ya ya  
Kpuku yenre e ya gya ka gyunma  
Di ba nka re ya ya*

English Transliteration:

It is done, it is finally done  
We have gotten our hearts' desire  
Love wins in the end

### ***Njeh Kreh* in Performance**

*Njeh Kreh* extols the viability of the dance profession, and addresses the multiple themes of talent for survival, creativity, entrepreneurship, partnership, job creation and economic empowerment. It narrates the story of two choreographers, Samu (male) and Likimi (female), as they outgrow rivalry to collaborate, leading to professional success and community development. The dance theatre piece opens with Likimi, who comes on stage with the sharp vibrating Mighili dance steps. Samu also comes on stage and challenges Likimi with the swift jerking Mbaya movements. Likimi wears a black camisole on Mighili traditional white wrapper accessorised with cowries and black buttons, while colourful Hausa Jigida beads sit gracefully on her waist. Samu adorns a mixture of the contemporary Mighili yellow shorts, spruced with the traditional Mighili beads, Hausa patari animal skin waist adornment, and Mada head gear for accessories. Likimi observes Samu's dance movements, then she copies and performs Samu's Mbaya dance to perfection.

Still in the spirit of competition, Samu and Likimi experiment with sustained gliding turns of the Afo movements, and the Rindre angular leg and arm movements of the Wamba people one after the other. In the end, they both come to an agreement to form an alliance, and they perform the vibrating Mighili movements in unison. As Samu and Likimi exhibit their dexterity with the various traditional dances, they discover that they complement each other. After competing with dances and coming to the realisation that they are both highly talented, Samu and Likimi decide to form a formidable alliance. They agree to go into a partnership and create a world-class dance troupe. Calling for an audition, they sing:

Mighili song:

*Aye nasibe e, zayara sisi be  
Na sibe o aye!*

English Transliteration:

Come and join me in the dance of productivity  
Do join me, please!

Mada song:

*Dere ya yi dere*  
*Bako, nima wurin da za ka kwana*  
*Dere ya yi dere*  
*Njeh, nima wurin da za ka kwana*

English Transliteration:

It is nighttime  
Visitor, go search for a resting place  
It is nighttime  
Poverty, go search for a resting place

Ninzom Song:

*Ba ruwan nge ni njieh*  
*Ba rawan nge njieh nge wei ker*

English Transliteration:

We have no business with poverty  
Poverty, you are on your own

Samu and Likimi conduct an audition, after which they take their dancers through rigorous training and exercises, using natural and pure movements. Soon, their “Jenkro Dance Academy” officially takes off with talented dancers. They sing a rousing song:

Eggon song:

*Aye... aye!*  
*Dagyi shgrarara dagyi shgra mo*  
*Aye Laila Dagyi shgra kpa'mgba*

English Transliteration:

Oh, my kinsmen  
Come let us dance to chase poverty away  
Let us dance, dance brings wealth

The Jenkro Dance Academy dance artistes go through vigorous rehearsals which culminate into a masterpiece of an eclectic mix of Vringbe, Likya, Mbaya, and Mighili movements of the Mada, Eggon, Ninzom, and Koro people respectively. Eventually, the Jenkro Dance Academy puts up a show for a paying audience. They also experiment with a unique blend of traditional and modern costumes and accessories. The male dancers wear the traditional Okpa Khose of the Alago people, accessorised with the colourful Koro beads and Eggon waist apron and head gear, while the female dancers adorn modern camisoles, tights, and short skirts accessorised with colourful Koro traditional beads.

Significantly, all the contemporary costumes worn by the dancers are designed in the diverse colours which can be found in the Nasarawa traditional looms costume. The piece ends with the choreographers paying the artists handsomely, after a very successful outing. The choreographers and dancers are happy for being able to make substantial money, and thus, empower themselves financially.

### **Two Dances in Diverse Spaces: A Discussion on *Su Dir* and *Njieh Kreh***

The two dance pieces, *Su Dir* and *Njieh Kreh*, are enactments of the ideology and aspirations of the Nasarawa people. While *Su Dir* illustrates that true love conquers all, *Njieh Kreh* advocates for teamwork and collaboration for professional success and national development. The choreographic materials for *Su Dir* were extracted from the Ashim, Likya, Vringbe, Kabulu, Ompokwu, Omadegye, Oyarore festivals of the Eggon, Mighili, Mada, Gbagyi, Gwandara, Afo, and the Alago people respectively. The dance piece also derives from cultural nuances such as the Kayanmata bridal procession in Gbagyi traditional wedding ceremony and the *Nar Mbe* marriage by abduction practice of the Mada people. Similarly, *Njieh Kreh* derives from the Nzeh, Gyele, Gbogun, Owa, and Odu festivals of the Mada, Wamba, Gbagyi, Gwandara, and the Alago people respectively. For both dance pieces, theatrical elements like movements, gestures, costume, accessories, make-up, props, songs, chants, and music were harnessed from the various ethnic groups within the state to arrive at the final products.

*Su Dir* was first performed at the 2008 edition of the National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST), which was held in Enugu, Enugu State (Nigeria). That year, NSPT won the Best Overall state award at NAFEST. The dance piece was later performed at the Nasarawa State Cultural Festival and the Calabar Christmas Carnival, Cross River State, both in December 2008. It was also the NSPT command performance as part of the activities at the cultural festival aspect of the Zaragoza International Exposition in Spain in September 2008. The troupe subsequently performed the dance piece at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Pan-African Culture Festival in Algiers in July 2009, and the NEPAD Business Group-sponsored African Business Roundtable Membership Mobilization in Johannesburg in December 2009. In a similar vein, *Njieh Kreh* is one of the artistic outputs that earned the NSPT the award of the Best Overall State at NAFEST 2010, which was held in Akwa Ibom, Uyo State (Nigeria). The dance was later performed at the 2010 edition of the Nasarawa State Cultural Festival. It was subsequently staged at the FIFA World Cup Cultural Fiesta in Johannesburg in June 2010 and at the African Business Roundtable event in Kuwait. Back home in

Nigeria, both dances have been performed by NSPT at several state and national government events.



Figure 1. *Su Dir* in performance at the National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST), Enugu, September 2008. (Source: David Tume)



Figure 2. *Su Dir* in performance at the Zaragoza International exposition, Zaragoza, Spain, September 2008. (Source: David Tume)

It is interesting to note how *Su Dir* and *Njeh Kreh* have evolved in diverse places over the years. For the creation of these dances, the NSPT adopts a choreographic approach which de-emphasises mono-ethnic identities and projects state identity (Tume, 2022, p. 282). The dances start out as authentic cultural expressions of individual ethnicities in Nasarawa state. However, after being blended

with cultural materials from various ethnic groups, they evolve from their mono-ethnic garbs to exude state identity. The implication is that when performed on national platforms such as NAFEST, the dance products are not viewed as individual ethnic dances, but as Nasarawa State dances. It then means that, at the local stage, the indigenous dances, though initially created for different purposes like worship, rituals, or communal edification, are re-created and moulded into a new form whereby they address contemporary issues. When moved to the international stage, the dances serve a different purpose of codifying and showcasing to the world the Nigerian cultural heritage in dance form. Resultantly, when performed at the international stage, members of the audience view them as Nigerian dances, not just Nasarawa state dances.

At national festivals like NAFEST the NSPT creative team observes other troupes and get new ideas which they inculcate into their performances. The same happens when the troupe performs at international festivals. The new ideas come in the form of new floor patterns, costume, and make-up design, as well as new ways of engaging with the audience. This ultimately causes a change in the forms of the dance theatres. According to the founding Director of the NSPT, Mallam Mohammed Egye, “the Nasarawa people proudly identify with these dances as they have been to places where the owners only dream of travelling to.” The mobility of the dances imbues them with cosmological attributes, “and when the dances return home, the Nasarawa people are excited to see their dances in new sophisticated forms” (personal communication, April 20, 2019). Another respondent, Mrs Glorie Ashikeni, who is the current NSPT Director, claims that the Nasarawa people take pride in saying “my ethnic dance has travelled as far as Europe” (personal communication, November 14, 2023).

The following are the significant factors that come to play when performing these dances at different spaces:

**Cast economy.** One of the advantages of performing locally is that the troupe is able to work with a large cast. However, when travelling abroad, the exigencies of funding require the troupe to work with a limited cast. For instance, at NAFEST and other functions in Nigeria, *Su Dir* was performed with a cast of 21. However, when performed in Spain and South Africa, the cast was drastically reduced to 12. This also mounts a lot of pressure on the cast, as they have to do more with fewer people. Similarly, *Njieh Kreh*, which was initially performed at NAFEST with 22 cast members, had to make do with a 12-man cast when performed in South Africa and Kuwait.

**Adaptation to new performance spaces.** Most Nigerian theatres and performance venues are in proscenium structure. Hence, the dances under study were created in this consciousness. However, when the NSPT travels, they have to contend with new stage structures like theatre-in-the-round and open-air performance venues. Hence, the performers have to adapt to the new stage structures. This is a major factor which affects the existing body and floor patterns as well as exits and entrances in the dances.

**Spectacle.** Performing in foreign spaces also means that there is more liberty

with exploration of ideas. As such, there is no strict adherence to culture-specific make-up, costumes, and accessories used in the performances. The NPST liberally embellishes their costumes, make-up, and accessories to make their performances extravagant and larger-than-life. Another determining factor for choice of costume is the weather of the foreign country. The Nigerian climate is mostly tropical and Nasarawa is one of the states that experiences high temperatures. As a result, the Nasarawa dress culture generally favours moderately light fabrics and sparse costume designs. However, having to perform in extremely cold weather in foreign countries makes the NSPT creative team devise ingenious means of embellishing costumes to keep the performers warm.

**Performance Timeframe.** The two dances under study were specifically created for NAFEST bearing in mind the festival's rule on a fifteen-minute timeframe for dance performances (NAFEST Handbook, 2009). However, the performance timeframe of the dance's shifts depending on the nature of the event where they are being performed. For instance, when performing at state functions or at international festivals, the troupes are given more time allowance. Thus, they are able to add solo or duet performances and drum ensemble to the existing dances.

### Conclusion

This paper has established that the NCAC mandate of the promotion, preservation and dissemination of the Nigerian diverse artistic and cultural expressions is actualized through the activities of the government-owned troupes. It also highlights the NSPT as one of the leading government-owned performing troupes in Nigeria. Through a performance analysis of *Su Dir* and *Njieh Kreh*, the paper brings to light how the choreographic approach adopted by the NSPT blurs ethnic distinctions. The troupe focuses on projecting dance as a shared heritage for state identity and global appeal.

Before they were performed at international festivals, the dances under study went through a transformational process which situates them comfortably in the universal space. The main factors of consideration in this process include cast economy, structure of performance space, performance timeframe, and embellishments aimed at creating spectacle. The implications of performing the dances in diverse spaces is that there are several versions of the same dance: the local, the national, and the international. For instance, *Su Dir* has the NAFEST, Calabar, Zaragoza, and Algiers versions. Similarly, *Njieh Kreh* has the NAFEST, South African, and Kuwait versions. The choice to perform any of these versions largely depends on the nature and venue of the performance.

Evidently, traditional dances which are exported from Nigeria abroad somehow find their way back home in new forms. The new form of dances is categorised as contemporary indigenous or neo-traditional dances that are performed only at social and government functions. It is purported that the pure original dances which have remained "untainted" by modernity are the only acceptable dances for performance at the sacred spaces during traditional ceremonies and festivals. However, if dance as cultural products are viewed from the lens of "local

universalisms” and/or “local cosmopolitanisms,” we will find that the “local, national, and universal” can run concurrently without contradictions (Lazarus, 2011, p. 1). We find instructive Simbao's (2018, p. 266) argument that “even sacred spaces in annual festivals are inevitably political to some degree and they involve ongoing negotiation and bargaining.” With modernity, some of these cosmological dance products may begin to find their way into sacred spaces.

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